



# Report to the Voters

From  
Representative

**BILL  
REAMS**

48th District

**Chairman, Government Reform and Land Use Committee**

## Dear friends,

The 1998 session got off to a snowy, but productive start Jan. 12. Rather than the pomp and circumstance which often accompanies the first day of session, we got down to business and began to work on legislation, even passing 25 bills in the first hours.

We have some major work ahead and a short time to do it — only 60 days scheduled for this regular session, with adjournment expected in mid-March. I wanted to take a moment of your time and provide an update of some of the major issues facing us this year — many of which will affect all of our daily lives.

## Budget surplus — What to do?

Thanks to a good economy and tax cuts provided in the last couple of years by the Legislature, the state now has an \$861 million budget surplus. For many, it may sound like a lot of money. But compared to the state's biennial general fund budget of more than \$19 billion, we begin to see how the surplus fares in the entire picture. As you can probably guess, many people began lining up even before session began to get a piece of the pie. A large part of this money, about \$550 million is carryover from the previous year. There seems to be some agreement that since this is one-time money, at least \$500 million should be put into an emergency reserve fund to protect against a possible future downturn in the economy.

The discussion this session is what to do with the remaining \$361 million. One suggestion is to lower the amount you pay for your vehicle license tabs. Others want to apply more money for schools and education. Another suggestion is for further property tax relief. And of course, the list goes on and on. The biggest quandary, however, comes with future effects of spending additional money now.

Under Initiative 601, if we increase state spending now, that will raise the lid for increased spending in the future — something that many want to avoid. The Legislature is committed to hold firm on our spending limitation laws. Any increased spending would likely be directed only for emergency needs.

## Transportation — How to fund it?

Another topic on the table this session is the continuing discussion of how to fund our state's transportation needs. Most people stuck in the daily commute on I-405, 520 and I-90 don't want excuses — they want answers.

The governor has proposed a \$2.4 billion transportation funding package that would increase the gas tax by 11 cents and reduce vehicle license fees by about \$35 per car. Republicans have introduced legislation that would also raise \$2.4 billion for transportation and would reduce vehicle license fees by about \$40 per car with no increase in the gas tax. Instead, the GOP plan calls for transferring money from the general fund portion of the motor vehicle excise tax (money you pay for vehicle license tabs) into the transportation budget. To do this without affecting education and other programs, the measure is being placed in the form of a referendum that would allow voters to decide whether these funds should be shifted without lowering the spending limitations mandated by Initiative 601.

## Public safety — Making streets safer

A strong emphasis continues in the 1998 legislative session toward increasing public safety. Lawmakers are looking at getting tough with those who drink and drive. Proposals include stiffer fines, lowering the legal blood-alcohol content limit from .10 to .08, and confiscating vehicles for repeat offenders.

We are also looking at changes to the operations and accountability of group homes where some juvenile offenders are housed. This would include: improved supervision and monitoring of offenders sentenced to juvenile facilities, better screening of offenders to ensure that society is protected from those who pose a threat, greater communication between juvenile authorities and laws enforcement to ensure that each offender's full record is known and that offender is treated appropriately, and stronger policies for safe and effective operation of privately operated group homes.

**Education — Improving reading skills**

It was encouraging to see that fourth-grade test scores in our local schools were considerably higher than the statewide average. That says a lot for our teachers on the Eastside. The tests were based on the highest standards ever established for Washington schools. They provide us with a benchmark which we can now measure against future scores as we attempt to improve education.

	Math	Reading	Writing	Listening
Statewide	21.5%	47.6%	42.2%	61.7%
Bellevue	34.7%	62.6%	57.2%	71.5%
Lake Washington	35.3%	64.2%	60.6%	73.0%
Issaquah	38.0%	67.4%	68.3%	78%

Source- Superintendent of Public Instruction - Spring 1997

Reading is one of the most important skills to be learned at an early age. Students must learn to read before they can accomplish anything else in school. That is why there is increased discussion in the Legislature about improving early reading standards in our public schools. Some of that discussion includes the use of phonics with whole language as a part of the reading curriculum.

**Regulatory reform — Reducing government**

For the past five years, I've been working to reform our state's regulatory system and cut the massive bureaucracy, regulations and government involvement into people's lives. We've made significant progress since beginning this work. Agencies can no longer write rules and regulations without clear justification. They must now meet specific criteria set up by the Legislature. Instead of automatically imposing penalties on businesses and people out of compliance with the hundreds of miles worth of state regulations, technical assistance is now offered to bring people into compliance.

This year, I have introduced legislation that would require rules to be reviewed every four years to determine whether they are still needed. It would also allow agencies to file for repeal of rules at any time, not just twice a year. And it would also require agencies to prepare an impact statement on the rules and regulations they propose so that the economic impact of that action on local governments is revealed before the rule is implemented.

While regulatory reform as a whole may not be an exciting subject, the important thing to remember is that we are working to reduce government's involvement in our lives. And we are restoring people's ability to live and thrive without being tied up in unnecessary bureaucratic red tape.

**I want to hear from you!**

I'd like to know where you stand on some of these issues discussed. Please feel free to write or call my office with your questions, comments, concerns or suggestions. You may call the toll-free legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000 or use my direct office number at (360) 786-7936. My address is listed below. I look forward to hearing from you.

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